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SUBJECT: KOSOVO: LDK WOBBLY AS PDK WINS TWO MORE MUNICIPALITIES

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1B. 09 PRISTINA 543  
1C. 09 PRISTINA 518  
1D. 09 PRISTINA 510

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SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - PLEASE PROTECT ACCORDINGLY.

11. (U) SUMMARY: The ruling Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) scored two impressive victories over its coalition partner Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) in the January 31 mayoral run-off elections in Prizren and Lipjan/Lipljan. The elections reaffirm PDK's confidence and unity under the leadership of Prime Minister Thaci, who suffered some political setbacks after PDK's poorer than expected showing following the first round of municipal elections on November 15. LDK, on the other hand, is suffering a pronounced reversal of fortune after promising first-round election results that produced few second round run-off victories. The recent high-decibel campaign rhetoric has left the PDK/LDK governing coalition bruised, but intact. The most recent election results should dampen enthusiasm for early national elections among some within LDK who may have been flirting with the idea (egged-on in part by a January offer from Ramush Haradinaj's Alliance for the Future of Kosovo to join his party in challenging PDK). Instead we expect we expect President Sejdiu and Prime Minister to turn their immediate attention to a long-rumored cabinet reshuffle. END SUMMARY.

TWO SOLID VICTORIES FOR PDK  
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12. (SBU) On January 31, voters in Prizren and Lipjan/Lipljan municipalities went to the polls for the third time in as many months to select new mayors. These polls, a repeat of the December 13 second-round runoffs, were ordered by the Central Election Commission (CEC) after the Election Complaints and Appeals Commission (ECAC) found significant evidence of electoral fraud in the December 13 contests. Both elections featured candidates from the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) and the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK), which form the national governing coalition. The CEC reported on February 1 that Prizren's incumbent PDK Mayor Ramadan Muja defeated his LDK challenger Hanefi Muharremi by 52.9 percent to 47.1 percent. In Lipjan/Lipljan, PDK incumbent Mayor Shukri Buja defeated the LDK challenger Imri Ahmeti by 53.7 percent to 46.3

percent. LDK campaign manager and senior party leader Lutfi Haziri said publicly on February 1 that his party would accept the election results, and it appears unlikely that there will be any challenges to the results. We dispatched 17 observation teams, including the Ambassador, to cover the elections in both municipalities. Neither we nor other diplomatic observer missions recorded evidence of widespread, intentional irregularities or obvious fraud.

#### REVERSALS OF FORTUNE FOR COALITION PARTNERS

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¶3. (SBU) Prizren and Lipjan/Lipljan cap three months of frenzied political maneuvering by PDK and LDK over municipal elections that has strained relations between the two. The first round of municipal elections sparked talk of an LDK revival -- the party has been reeling since a dramatic electoral defeat in 2007 -- after it picked up some new mayoralalties. Conversely, PDK, Kosovo's largest party, appeared vulnerable after the first round elections left it with fewer-than-expected decisive victories and facing almost a dozen competitive second round mayoral run-offs. PDK's fortunes improved on December 13 when it won most of its second round run-off mayoral elections. Victories in Prizren and Lipjan/Lipljan on January 31 have now reinforced PDK's image as Kosovo's dominant political party. LDK leaders, who just last week publicly questioned whether the coalition with PDK would remain viable after anticipated electoral wins in Prizren and Lipjan/Lipljan, now must reassess LDK's competitiveness. Speculation that President Sejdiu (LDK) would call for early national elections has dampened considerably, and this possibility appears less likely. Most now expect the coalition to continue limping along for the time being.

#### IMPENDING CABINET SHUFFLE

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¶4. (SBU) Thaci and Sejdiu must now reestablish a frayed power-sharing arrangement. Both have been pointing to the likelihood of a government reshuffle as the principal vehicle for strengthening the coalition's harmony. Each leader has suggested to us that the reshuffle would follow after the Lipjan/Prizren elections, and Pristina has been abuzz for weeks with conflicting rumors over which ministers might lose their jobs. The most credible recent reports contend that the ministers of Justice, Health, and Youth and Culture -- all LDK ministries -- will be replaced. Information from the always tight-lipped PDK on their candidates for reshuffling is more sparse, but Deputy Prime Minister Kuci and Minister for Transport Fatmir Limaj may be moving on to other jobs, according to Pristina's rumor mill. Regardless, LDK is in a weak bargaining position and will find it difficult to argue that it deserves the helm of the long-promised, new Ministry for European Integration. We expect, however, that LDK, in its discussions with PDK, will try to leverage its growing parliamentary caucus -- on January 29, a new parliamentary group of seven ethnic minority MPs called the Coalition for Integration joined LDK's Assembly caucus, enlarging it from 26 to 33 MPs. (Note: PDK retains the largest caucus in the Kosovo Assembly with 37 MPs; LDK is the second-largest caucus. End Note)

#### FLOWERS FOR FATMIR, LOVE RAMUSH

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¶5. (SBU) Ramush Haradinaj's Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK) throughout this month has been trying to sell President Sejdiu on a plan for AAK-LDK partnership aimed at, collapsing the current government, forming a new AAK-LDK governing coalition, and forcing early national elections. AAK's coalition proposal to LDK followed simple arithmetic; neither LDK nor AAK have enough parliamentary seats on their own to form a government without a partner, but they could together. AAK also argued that a coalition with it was the only way for LDK to reverse its political fortunes, since so many of its traditional supporters were unhappy with LDK's alliance with PDK. AAK officials made the offer on January 6. At the time, LDK party leaders told us that the coalition offer from AAK was dead on arrival, a stance they maintained publicly when news of the proposal

subsequently leaked to the media. Tensions between Sejdiu and Haradinaj were reportedly part of the problem. The odds are against a future AAK/LDK coalition unless LDK can overcome its fears and resentments toward AAK or until it finds continued cohabitation with PDK unbearable.

FOLLOWING DEATH OF ISTOG MAYOR, ANOTHER ELECTION  
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16. (SBU) LDK suffered more municipal misfortune on January 30, when Fadil Ferati, its longtime mayor of Istog/Istok municipality passed away following a battle with cancer. According to Kosovo law, Istog will contest a new election in the coming weeks to replace the mayor. LDK will face a significant challenge with this election, as Istog/Istok is in western Kosovo and borders the AAK municipal stronghold of Peje/Pec. AAK ran a strong candidate in Istog/Istok during the first round of municipal elections in November. The party subsequently made a shrewd tactical move when it announced it would not compete against the popular, but terminally ill, Ferati in the second round run-off election in December. Istog/Istok was LDK's last remaining office in western Kosovo, and Ferati's death leaves the party with poor prospects to hold the mayor's office there in the face of a strengthening AAK. The loss of Istog/Istok would reduce LDK -- which until 2007 controlled 20 of Kosovo's then 26 municipalities with ethnic Albanian majorities -- to running Pristina and a handful of municipalities in northeast Kosovo.

COMMENT  
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17. (SBU) LDK enjoyed some success with the first round of elections on November 15. The President's party kept control of Pristina -- the big prize -- and picked up some municipalities that it had lost in 2007. The euphoria, however, did not last for long. The party contested 12 mayoral run-offs in December and won only 5 of them. The outcome of the Gjilan/Gnjilane election is still uncertain. The losses in Prizren and Lipjan/Lipljan complete the picture of a party

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that mistook survival for victory in the 2009 municipal elections, and there is a very real possibility that LDK will have to endure another loss once there is an election in Istog/Istok. This series of electoral disappointments could set the ground for a contentious LDK party convention in the Spring -- the first since 2006, when disaffected Nexhat Daci supporters splintered from LDK to form the Democratic League of Dardania. We would not be surprised to see Sejdiu postpone or cancel the planned convention. PDK, of course, is enjoying its victories in Prizren and Lipjan/Lipljan and shows little interest in upending a government that continues to pay it ample dividends in power and patronage. Barring some external shock that motivates a change of heart for the President or Prime Minister, the PDK/LDK coalition seems poised to wobble on for the foreseeable future.

DELL